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GREAT BRITAIN AND THE EASTERN QUESTION

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I. THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND ETHNIC BACKGROUND

Any survey of the eastern problem must begin with geographical and ethnic factors which have tended to complicate the issues in the Balkan Peninsula. Two, at least, of the early settlers, the Albanians and the Greeks, penetrated into that land from the sea. Then, through the gap between the Carpathians and the Black Sea, there poured the Slavs, viz., the Croats, Serbs, and Bulgars (the last being Slavized Tartars), also the Rumans, who mingled with Roman settlers and adopted their language and civilization. All of these were conquered by the Turks, who, however, failed to force their religion and customs on more than a few. The eastern question centers in the religious, social and political antagonisms thus created. Yet, the Christian powers, when at war among themselves, did not scruple to use the Turks as a powerful piece in the game.

II. THE ORIGIN OF THE EASTERN QUESTION

The first important connection between Great Britain and the eastern question was in 1791, when the Tsarina,

Catherine II of Russia, seemed about to drive the Turks beyond the River Dniester. Pitt, the younger, sought to induce the British parliament to intervene in their favor, his aim being to set bounds to Russian ambitions which began to threaten the land approaches to India. In this he failed, parliament taking no interest in the maintenance of Turkish authority or of the balance of power in the East. The second occasion was more threatening. In 1798 Bonaparte, after securing the Ionian Isles and Malta, captured Egypt, with the ulterior object of founding a naval base at Suez for the purpose of ousting the British from India. This plan, more melodramatic than sound, in view of Britain's naval supremacy, was shorn asunder by Nelson at the Battle of the Nile, and thereafter the British took Malta, and, at the treaty of Amiens (March, 1802) sought to restore the *status quo* in the Mediterranean. Bonaparte's immediate resumption of his oriental schemes made peace impossible; and war ensued, largely on the eastern question, in May, 1803.

The British policy of maintaining the balance of power was illustrated by the European settlement of 1815. But Turco-Egyptian atrocities in Greece brought about the joint intervention of the British, French, and Russian fleets at Navarino (October, 1827) which virtually freed the Greek people. On the other hand, the Crimean War was, so far as concerned the British people, a well-meant effort to set Turkey on her feet again; but it failed, owing to the incurable bigotry and corruption of the Turkish Government. The same defects brought about the risings of the Christians of European Turkey in 1875-76, when the Beaconsfield cabinet unwisely encouraged the Porte to resist the pressure of the other Powers exerted for the purpose of securing much needed reforms. After the collapse of Ottoman power in the Russo-Turkish War, the Beaconsfield government, supported by Austria, succeeded in mitigating the terms imposed by Russia on the Porte, and be-

came responsible, jointly with the other powers, for the liberal treatment of Turkey. But the Porte again ignored its solemn obligations in this matter, and passed over the protests of the powers. Several massacres of Christians were carried out by secret orders of Sultan Abdul Hamid II; and the European powers were unable to right this grievous wrong.

III. GERMANY AND THE EASTERN QUESTION

In and after 1898 a new influence began to mould affairs in the Near East. In the autumn of that year Kaiser William II proceeded to Constantinople, fraternized with Sultan Abdul Hamid, and, proceeding to Jerusalem and Damascus, proclaimed that he would always champion the interests of the Moslem peoples. His negotiations with the Porte resulted in the Bagdad Railway being begun in 1903, its course being into Central Asia Minor and Cilicia. Avowedly, its *raison d'être* was commercial and cultural; but in 1911 its literary champion, Herr Paul Rohrbach, admitted that along its course, and that of its Palestine extension, a blow might be delivered at Britain's spinal cord, the Suez Canal.

The predominantly German character of this undertaking and the extensive concessions acquired by Germany on both sides of the line, had meanwhile alarmed France and Russia. Both powers saw their important interests in the Levant seriously menaced by new and powerful competitors; for it was clear that the Central Empires, with the added influence gained by the presence of German sovereigns at Bukharest and Sofia, were in a highly favorable situation for controlling the Balkan Peninsula, Asia Minor, Syria, and Mesopotamia. Their political connections, no less than the through railway communications then being forged, promised to lay at their feet the most central and strategically important land in the Old World.

These considerations dulled the former rivalries between Great Britain, France, and Russia in that quarter, and the three Powers tended to draw together for mutual support. In April, 1904, Great Britain and France composed their outstanding disputes respecting Siam, the Newfoundland fisheries, etc., and framed the *Entente Cordiale*. In August, 1907, the Anglo-Russian Entente came about.

There can be little doubt that fear of Austro-German supremacy in the Near East was one of the motives that conduced to these important agreements between the three powers. Great Britain perceived her interests in the Suez Canal and the Persian Gulf to be endangered; France felt nervous about her trade with the Syrian ports; and Russia foresaw the overthrow of her long cherished hopes of controlling the natural exits of her vast southern trade to western Europe whether by the Dardanelles or through the harbor of Alexandretta. By the year 1907 the need for Russia to secure access to ice-free ports was all the more urgent because the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05) had dashed her hopes of securing such ports on the Pacific coast of Siberia. Consequently, Great Britain found her former rivals in the Orient ready to conclude friendly arrangements, which were destined to ripen into alliances under the pressure of Austro-German hostilities in 1914. Other motives, such as fear of Germany's rapidly expanding navy, must have played their part in bringing about the formation of the ententes; but the aim of Austrian and German policy to control the Balkan Peninsula and the Near East undoubtedly contributed towards the new grouping of the powers. The new alignment became more pronounced in the years 1908-11 owing to two important events, Austria's annexation of Bosnia, and Germany's acquisition of predominant rights over the port of Alexandretta. German officers also played the chief part in the reorganization of the Turkish army, and British influence over the Sublime Porte, strong for a time after the Turkish

revolution of 1908, gave way more and more before that of Germany.

It is an open secret that, during the Balkan War of 1912, Berlin expected the Turks to beat the Balkan Allies—Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece—and was profoundly disappointed at the victory of the Christian states. But the fratricidal Balkan strife which ensued in 1913, probably stirred up from Vienna, enabled the Porte to regain some of the lost ground, and the entente powers were again left in a position of inferiority in Balkan politics.

Mr. Morgenthau's book, *Secrets of the Bosphorus*, reveals some of the methods whereby Germany and Austria gained the upper hand at Constantinople. *Inter alia* he describes the high-handed proceedings of the German general, Liman von Sanders, who had been sent from Berlin in order to reorganize the Turkish army. A characteristic episode was the behavior of the general at an official dinner which that ambassador gave at the American embassy in commemoration of Washington's birthday. Morgenthau resolved to invite the general, and took skilled advice as to the allocation of his seat at the table. It appeared that the appropriate chair was number 13. The guest, however, took the affair very ill, and afterwards an official remonstrance was made to Mr. Morgenthau on the ground that the general should have had precedence over the ambassadors and the Turkish ministers. The incident was one of many which revealed the extravagant claims of Germany in Turkish circles.

IV. THE EASTERN QUESTION AND THE WORLD WAR

Undoubtedly, the growing dependence of Turkey upon the Central Empires contributed to the outbreak of the World War. Its proximate cause was the murder of the Austrian Archduke, Francis Ferdinand, by two pro-Serb fanatics at Sarajevo in June, 1914, which occurred at a time when Germany's preparations for war had attained

unparalleled completeness. Outwardly that murder seemed to concern Austria and Serbia alone. In reality it reopened the eastern question, and in a way highly favorable to the Central Empires.

Not only the military but also the diplomatic situation promised success to their efforts. Serbia was isolated and unpopular, and the other Balkan States seemed likely to join the Central Empires or to observe a friendly neutrality. It is not generally known that on August 2, 1914, Turkey signed a secret treaty of alliance with Germany, binding herself to afford armed help at a suitable opportunity. The Turks skilfully kept this alliance secret, meanwhile assuring Great Britain and France that they were their true friends. This statement held good, doubtless, for some of the Turkish ministers; but, none the less, the Porte was secretly committed to break with the entente powers. Therefore, they, especially Great Britain, in the affair of the *Goeben* and *Breslau*, were at a grave disadvantage. Owing to their ignorance of the real situation at Constantinople, they played a waiting game which directly furthered the aims of the Central Empires. But this was not all. The evidence revealed in the Kautsky volumes proves that, from June 28 until near the end of July, Kaiser William was urging on the Austrian government to vigorous action in Balkan affairs.¹ He also brushed aside the objections of the Austrian ambassador at Constantinople to the formation of a Balkan League and declared that now was the time to win over every rifle which was ready in the Balkans. He further warned King Constantine that Greece must take the side of the Central Powers.

¹Kautsky, Foreign Minister after the German Revolution of November, 1918, caused the despatches of the German Foreign Office relating to the outbreak of war to be published. They were edited by Herren Montgelas and Schücking. The Kaiser's comments on the dispatches are reproduced in full. They prove that he expected Turkey, Rumania, and Bulgaria and, if possible, Greece to make war on Russia and Serbia, in order to free the Balkans forever from Russian influence. Kautsky, *Dokumente des Weltkrieges*, Vol. IV, pp. 121, 133, 136, 162, 164.

British and French diplomacy failed, in the crisis of July-August, 1914, to hold its own on the Bosphorus. The Turks welcomed the German warships, *Goeben* and *Breslau*, which sought refuge in the Bosphorus; and neither British nor French warships were sent after them out of regard for the supposed neutrality of the Sublime Porte. Near the end of October, 1914 that government threw off the mask by sudden attacks on Russian harbors and on the Egyptian frontier districts. The entente powers responded by declarations of war. The rupture was due to the resolve of the forward wing of the Turkish ministers, especially Enver, to recover the lands formerly lost to Russia, and the control of Cyprus and Egypt lost to Great Britain.

British policy in the Near East during the crisis of July-August, 1914, must be pronounced weak and unenterprising. It was caught unawares by the Sublime Porte, who, on the contrary, displayed unexpected daring and staked everything on the victory of the Central Empires.

The Turkish attack on Russia having all but sundered her from her western allies, it became their duty to help her; and the most feasible plan seemed to be to force the Dardanelles, and compel the Porte to a peace by the threat of bombarding Constantinople. That blow, if successful, would both paralyze Turkey and liberate Russia from the encircling policy skilfully prepared by the Central Empires. The blow missed its mark, and that ill-starred but glorious enterprise cost the British force 117,000 casualties. Nevertheless, it cost the Turks about as many of their best troops and greatly lightened their pressure upon Russia's Caucasus frontier. After the Gallipoli venture, the Allies sent troops to hold positions in front of Salonika. I do not intend to describe that campaign. The Allies finally formed a long front, and in the sequel their efforts were justified; for, although there was a terrible loss of life, their forces prevented Greece from being overrun and saved Greek harbors and islands from becoming the bases for

German submarines. Thus, the Salonika expedition helped to save the naval situation in the Eastern Mediterranean. Ultimately the Salonika policy was vindicated by the successful and brilliant Allied advance of the autumn of 1918.

Away in the Persian Gulf an expedition was sent to save British commercial interests in that quarter, and also to save the oil wells which furnished the chief means of providing motive power to the British fleet in the East Indies. And we may here note that the Australian and Indian contingents could scarcely have been brought across to take part in the European war but for the oil saved from the Turks by the arrival of the British expedition. The first advance up the Tigris was a failure and led to the surrender of about 8000 British and Indian troops—the biggest surrender in British military annals since that at Yorktown. However, in the long run Britain made good; for, early in March, 1917, General Maude made a triumphant entry into Bagdad and saved that part of the world from Turkish influence.

We also attacked the Turks on their Palestine front. Probably we ought to have attacked their communications by a landing at Alexandretta; but, for reasons that are obscure, that step was not taken. In the direct advance on Palestine there was an awkward failure at Gaza; but, finally, when Allenby was appointed, we broke through the Turkish line and captured Jerusalem. Then there ensued a long wait while Allenby was preparing to deal a final blow at the Turkish line of defense. The Turks, on a 50-mile front north of Nablus, offered tenacious resistance; but Allenby, after skilful feints, as though going to attack on the Jordan side, finally made his main attack near the coast. That attack, being helped by British and French gunboats and destroyers, was an entire success. The Turks were taken by surprise. Allenby was able to pour through his Australian and Indian cavalry; which, along with the airmen, almost destroyed the Turkish army. It made no

stand either at Damascus or Aleppo. We are, therefore, warranted in saying that the victory of Allenby near Armageddon in September, 1918, was amongst the most decisive of the world's battles, because it broke forever the Turkish power in Syria and Asia Minor.

V. POST-WAR PROBLEMS AND THE FUTURE OF THE EASTERN QUESTION

What is the upshot of the immense change brought about by the Turkish collapse? In brief, it is this: The Christian people of the Balkans have now received boundaries which, in general, correspond to their just claims. Of course, the new boundaries do not content them. No student of Balkan history ever expected that any settlement would content the Balkans. Those races have to learn that you cannot get everything in this world, that it is necessary to settle down and try to be good neighbors, even though you have not received satisfaction to what are conceived to be just claims. In fact, the ethnic and geographical entanglements of those peoples do not admit of a thorough settlement apart from an extensive series of migrations, voluntary or compulsory. Again, I think it is a mistake that the Turk was left in Constantinople; but he was left there, apparently, because the French began to take a somewhat pro-Turkish view. Also, it is said, some British ministers thought that if the Turk was left in Constantinople, he would be more amenable to argument from the civilized powers than if he was driven into the interior of Asia Minor. Those who use that argument should not scruple to use force, if force becomes necessary. I do not myself see signs of any action, either at Paris or at London, which ought to be the result of such an argument. The Turks have been guilty, since the armistice, of abominable cruelties towards the Greeks and Armenians. They have not yet received punishment; and, so far as we know, no pressure has been exercised. Discredit ought to rest

upon those in authority who, after framing that argument, yet have failed to act upon it.

As regards Bulgaria, Serbia and Rumania, they are involved in various frontier disputes. The Greeks are on bad terms with Albania; there is fighting going on there, as also in the parts of Thrace ceded by Turkey to Greece. These disputes must be isolated, and, perhaps, in course of time, they will simmer down. There is some ground for the view that the better elements among the Balkan peoples will assume the leadership and rectify this to a certain degree. I heard an intelligent Serbian speak as follows: "We Serbs hate the Bulgars because they tried to blot out the Serbian name and race by destroying our libraries, etc., but, still, we have to live with them." That is the sensible attitude; and if only the Serbians will adopt it, and if the Bulgars act likewise, more cordial relations may develop. It must, however, be long before the hatred aroused by the wars of 1913 and 1915-18 die down. Nevertheless, if better counsels prevail and if prudent statesmen come to the front, I do not see why M. de Laveleye's ideal should not be realized. That Belgian publicist visited the Balkans in 1885, and foretold that the solution of the eastern question was that all these peoples should be liberated and should form a Christian federation on fair and friendly terms. British policy should, and probably will, be directed to the attainment of that desirable end.

Again, there is the Armenian question. The Armenians are a gifted race; they are expert in trade and finance, they are easily the superiors of the Turks, which is the chief reason why the Turks hate them. They live in scattered territories, from Cilicia to lands bordering on Mount Ararat. During the recent war, about a million and a third Armenians have been done to death by the Turks, and that process is going on. The great powers seem to be impotent at this point, partly because the Turk has set up a semi-independent government. The Turkish Nationalists' government, hav-

ing its capital at Angora, is a potent factor in the politics of Asia Minor; for although the civilized powers have tried to exert influence on the Sultan's government yet they do not exert any control over the Nationalists. Of late, however, the Greeks have been warring, and for a time successfully, against the Nationalist Turks. An opportunity may occur for the civilized powers to intervene and it is to be hoped that this Nationalist clique will be suppressed. It is also to be hoped that the consciousness of the civilized nations may be aroused to the horrors now going on in Armenia, and that the remnants of that race may be saved.

In Palestine and Syria the outlook is, on the whole, promising. Most of the peoples of Syria seem to be inclined to settle down under France. She acts as mandatory for that extensive land from the sources of the Jordan on the south to the borders of Cilicia on the north, and she has occupied the Arab city, Damascus. Great Britain has the thankless task of acting as mandatory for Palestine. Four-fifths of the population is non-Jewish and, yet, some of the more extreme Zionists have set forth claims to predominance. Mr. Balfour's statement as to the future of Palestine has been quoted, and sometimes misquoted. He said that the Allies were determined that Palestine should become a national home for the Jews, but he added the qualifying clause that due regard should be paid to the rights of other races there settled—meaning, of course, the Arabs and also the Christian communities. On the other hand, the Arabs have taken the Jewish claims very ill, and much friction has arisen between the two peoples. Finally, it seems, the British government has succeeded in bringing about something like a truce between them, and there is hope that these two peoples will agree to settle down on friendly terms. The Arabs, however, are exceedingly annoyed with the French for taking Damascus. The Arabs did not of themselves drive the Turks from Damascus; but they had done good work of a guerrilla kind in Allenby's

campaign, and they thought they had Damascus as a sure prize. It is likely that promises were then made to them. However that may be, and the affair is still obscure, the Arabs were furious at the French occupation of Damascus; and their anger fell equally on the British with the French. If that dispute can be peaceably adjusted, which, of course, is doubtful, there is a fair chance that affairs in Palestine and Syria will settle down. In that case there will be a possibility of the revival of peace and prosperity in the Near East such as never has been known in civilized times.

Equally bright is the outlook for Mesopotamia, henceforth to be known officially as Irak, if only the new king, formerly known as the Emir Feisal of Hedjaz, succeeds in establishing his rule at Bagdad under the suzerainty of Great Britain. His task in curbing unruly Bedouins and thwarting the intrigues of Turks, Persians and Bolsheviks will be a hard one; but all friends of progress will trust that this interesting experiment of an Arab kingdom, established at the ancient seat of the Khalifs, may be crowned with success. With the attainment of political stability will come the opportunity for developing the irrigation works on the Tigris and Euphrates, which the Turks had allowed to go to ruin. Irrigation will bring to that land a prosperity which it has not known during many centuries.

Not only in Mesopotamia, but also in Palestine, Syria, Asia Minor and the Balkan lands, the necessary condition for healthy progress is the dying down of the narrow and intolerant Nationalism, which has been the bane of our age. Alike cramping and irritating to all peoples, it has been the fundamental cause of the World War. And nowhere has its influence been so noxious as in the Near East. There, often intensified by religious bigotry, it has set race against race and been the fruitful mother of strife and massacre. Until Nationalism and bigotry are exorcized, there will be no sure peace, and, therefore, no continuous advance of

industry and civilization; but those lands will remain the hunting-ground of intriguing politicians and vendors of arms.

The record of the civilized powers in regard to the Near East is a sorry one. That of Great Britain is in parts, far from creditable. In 1876-78 the Beaconsfield Government sinned against morality, good sense, and statesmanship by supporting the Turk; and the means whereby that prime minister secured control over Cyprus were odious. But the conscience of the nation revolted against his pro-Turkish policy; and Abdul Hamid's crimes completed the conversion. As has been shown above, the resolve of Kaiser William, first to protect, then to exploit, Turkey, helped to bring about a complete change in the relations of the great powers. Along with other developments of German policy, it served to end the long rivalries of Great Britain, France, and Russia and to group those powers in the ententes of 1904 and 1907. The development of the oriental policies of the two kaisers cemented those agreements; and the outbreak of the World War, due in the last resort to the eastern question in its new phase, clinched them in one of the vastest and firmest alliances of all time. The aggressive action of the Porte in October, 1914, ended, once for all, the pro-Turkish proclivities at Westminster, which had marked British policy under the younger Pitt, Wellington, Palmerston and Beaconsfield. Thanks to the Turks themselves, Great Britain finally stumbled on the right conclusion—that the Turkish Empire was not to be regarded as a barrier necessary to the continuance of British rule in India, but that true protection was to be found in the loyalty of India and in the friendship of the peoples of the Near East who had long groaned under Turkish misrule. When similar convictions prevail at Paris and Rome, there can and will arise a new and wider entente, which will aim at securing the welfare of that long stricken quarter of the globe.